



ADS Chapter 580

Conference Planning and Attendance

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Functional Series 500 – Management Services
Chapter 580 – Conference Planning and Attendance

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Functional Series 500: Management Services

ADS Chapter 580 – Conference Planning and Attendance

*580.1

OVERVIEW

Effective Date: 07/06/2012

This chapter provides the Agency policy directives and required procedures governing conferences funded in whole or in part by USAID and the attendance of USAID employees at conferences sponsored by others. A conference is defined as a seminar, meeting, retreat, symposium, workshop, training activity or other such event that **requires temporary duty travel of any attendees**. This policy is applicable to conferences funded with USAID operating expense and program funds (including those hosted by implementing partners), with the exception of the following:

- Conference expenses paid under grants to grantees.
- Routine meetings with partners and meetings among USAID staff when there are fewer than 20 employees in attendance and the costs are under \$100,000.
- Recurring training included in the Training Quality Assurance Council's Course Inventory that requires participant registration through the USAID University Learning Management System.
- Events funded and scheduled by the Office of Human Resources' Training and Education Division.
- Regularly scheduled courses of instruction conducted at a U.S. Government or commercial training facility.

*580.2

PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES

Effective Date: 07/06/2012

- a. **The Administrator (AID/A)** approves a waiver to fund a single conference with estimated costs in excess of \$500,000 when it is determined to be the most cost-effective option to achieve a compelling purpose.
- b. **The Deputy Administrator (AID/A)** approves expenditures for internal and external conferences that fall between \$100,000 and \$500,000.
- c. **The Chief Operating Officer (AID/A/COO)** approves conference expenditures of \$100,000 and below for both internal and external conferences.
- d. **The Chief, Bureau for Management, Office of Management Services, Travel and Transportation Division (M/MS/TTD)** develops and publishes policies and

required procedures regarding conference planning and attendance and manages the conference approval process.

- e. **The Conference Attendee** requests approval from the COO for external conference attendance in sufficient time to take advantage of early registration fees and submits an expense voucher to account for his/her travel and related costs upon conclusion of the conference.
- f. **The Assistant Administrators and Independent Office Directors** (1) request approval from the COO for all conferences funded by the Bureau or Independent Office that 20 or more USAID employees are expected to attend; and (2) ensure that the Bureau/Independent Office representation at USAID-sponsored or external conferences is limited to the minimum number of attendees necessary to accomplish the Agency's mission.

580.3 POLICY DIRECTIVES AND REQUIRED PROCEDURES

***580.3.1 Justification and Approval of Conference Expenditures**

Effective Date: 07/06/2012

USAID managers must be fiscally responsible in planning conferences and in making decisions regarding conference attendance. Staff attending conferences must have a work-related need to attend, and USAID-funded conferences must be in support of the Agency's mission. Conference expenditures must be justified based on one or more of the following:

- Furthers one of the Agency's core development objectives;
- Supports the USAID Forward Agenda;
- Contributes to relationships with key constituencies;
- Advances leadership in the development community;
- Responds to Congressional mandates or Federal compliance requirements;
- Provides critical training that is relevant to an employee's work.

Managers must make every effort to minimize conference costs, maximize the use of government-owned facilities, and identify opportunities to reduce costs in selecting conference locations and facilities.

Approval is required to fund:

- (a) USAID-sponsored conferences that 20 or more USAID employees are expected to attend;
- (b) Conferences to be sponsored or hosted by USAID (or by other Federal or non-Federal entities), where the net conference expenses by USAID will exceed

\$100,000 (direct and indirect costs), regardless of the number of USAID participants; and

- (c) The attendance of three or more employees Agency-wide at the same external conference.

The approving officials for conference expenditures are as follows:

- The Chief Operating Officer must approve conference expenditures of \$100,000 and below for both internal and external conferences.
- The Deputy Administrator must approve all conferences (internal and external), where expenditures are expected to fall between \$100,000 and \$500,000.
- The Agency is prohibited from incurring expenses greater than \$500,000 on a single conference. The Administrator may provide a waiver from this prohibition if he/she determines that exceptional circumstances exist whereby spending in excess of \$500,000 on a single conference is the most cost-effective option to achieve a compelling purpose.

***580.3.2 External Conference Attendance**

Effective Date: 07/06/2012

USAID representation at conferences must be limited to the minimum number of attendees necessary to accomplish the Agency's mission (see the [Federal Travel Regulation, Chapter 301, Part 301-74.18](#)). Bureaus/Independent Offices must consider travel and other expenses when selecting attendees. Approval must be provided for three or more employees Agency-wide to incur costs to attend the same external conference. After obtaining approval from their supervisor, all USAID employees who would like to attend an external conference must enter a request in the eConference Tracking and Approval System (eCTAS). (See **580.3.3** for additional information on eCTAS.)

USAID employees attending conferences must comply with Federal regulations ([FTR Chapter 301, Part 301-74](#)) and Agency policies on conference-related travel, meals, lodging, and other expenses.

580.3.2.1 Registration Fees

Effective Date: 04/11/2012

Employees must make every effort to take advantage of early registration discounts. Managers must only approve late registration fees when extenuating circumstances prevented the employee from taking advantage of the regular or early fee. Attendees will be reimbursed for a discounted payment for a conference registration fee when travel to the event has been approved and a proper claim for reimbursement of expenses (voucher) is submitted. In cases where an attendee is unable to attend an event for which a registration fee was paid in advance of the event, the attendee must seek a refund of the registration fee and repay the Agency with any refund received. If no refund is made, the Agency must absorb the advanced payment if the attendee's failure to attend the event was caused either by an Agency decision or for reasons beyond the employee's control that are acceptable to the Agency, such as an unforeseen illness or emergency. If no refund is made, and the attendee's failure to attend the scheduled event is due to reasons deemed inexcusable by the Agency, the traveler must repay the Agency for the amount advanced.

580.3.2.2 Meals and Light Refreshments

Effective Date: 04/11/2012

When meals or light refreshments are furnished by the sponsoring organization or are included in the registration fee, the applicable meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) must be calculated.

(a) If meals are furnished, the appropriate deduction from the M&IE rate must be made. (See [FTR Chapter 301, Part 301-11.18.](#))

(b) If light refreshments are furnished, no deduction of the M&IE allowance is required. Light refreshments for morning, afternoon, or evening breaks are defined to include, but are not limited to, coffee, tea, milk, juice, soft drinks, donuts, bagels, fruit, pretzels, cookies, chips, or muffins.

580.3.2.3 Conference Lodging

Effective Date: 04/11/2012

As a general rule, lodging costs should be within the established lodging portion of the per diem rate for the locality. The employee may be authorized to use the conference lodging allowance if lodging at the conference site will exceed the lodging portion of the per diem rate. (See [FTR Chapter 301, Part 301-74.7.](#)) The conference lodging allowance is a pre-determined maximum allowance of up to 25 percent greater than the applicable locality portion of the per diem rate. Under this reimbursement method, employees will be reimbursed the actual amount for lodging up to the conference lodging allowance. The travel authorization must specifically state that the conference lodging allowance is requested. If the conference lodging allowance is inadequate, the

attendee may be authorized reimbursement under the actual expense method of reimbursement.

See also [ADS 633, Financial Management Aspects of Temporary Duty \(TDY\) Travel](#) and [ADS 522, Performance of Temporary Duty Travel in the U.S. and Abroad](#).

***580.3.3 USAID-Funded Conferences**

Effective Date: 07/06/2012

USAID B/IOs must plan and approve USAID-funded conferences in accordance with the Federal Travel Regulations ([FTR Chapter 301-74](#)), the [Federal Acquisition Regulation](#), and USAID policies, e.g., ADS 610. When planning a conference, Bureaus/Independent Offices must:

- (a) Assure that there is appropriate management oversight of the conference planning process;
- (b) Document all direct and indirect conference costs (including employee salaries) to be paid by USAID, whether paid directly or reimbursed to travelers or others associated with the conference, and consider how costs may be minimized ;
- (c) Consider alternatives to a conference, such as videoconferencing and teleconferencing;
- (d) Maximize the use of Government-owned or Government-provided conference facilities as much as possible;
- (e) Identify opportunities to reduce costs in selecting a particular conference location and facility (for example, through the availability of lower rates during the off-season at a site with seasonal rates); and
- (f) Ensure that the conference planner or designee does not retain for personal use any promotional benefits or materials received from the travel service provider as a result of booking the conference.

See also [FTR Chapter 301, Appendix E, Suggested Guidance for Conference Planning](#).

The COO's approval is required to fund a conference that 20 or more USAID employees are expected to attend. Conference coordinators must request approval through the eConference Tracking and Approval System (eCTAS). (See **580.3.3** for additional information on eCTAS). The conference coordinator must obtain approval before commitments are made or costs are incurred and should request approval a minimum

of 30 days prior to the event. S/he must provide the following documentation through the eCTAS:

- (a) An action memorandum from the Assistant Administrator or Independent Office Director certifying that the proposed conference costs are comprehensive and represent the greatest cost advantage to the U.S. Government. To hold a conference at an overseas location, this action memorandum must include clearance from the Mission Director;
- (b) If the estimated cost exceeds \$500,000, the Administrator must sign a waiver for the Agency to fund the conference. In this case, the action memorandum must be addressed to the Administrator and will serve as the waiver request. The memorandum must discuss why a single conference is the most cost effective option to achieve a compelling purpose.
- (c) A cost comparison for three potential venues (including a U.S. Government owned or leased facility) and a justification if the lowest cost facility is not selected;
- (d) A line item budget for the total estimated cost of the conference (e.g., estimated salary of participants during the conference and while in travel status, travel and per diem, venue, facilitators, meals, equipment, printing, access fees, ground transportation);
- (e) A determination that meals provided to local employees are a necessary expense for a conference that meets the criteria for a training activity.

***580.3.3.1 Cost Comparisons for the Venue**

Effective Date: 07/06/2012

A conference coordinator seeking a facility for a conference must conduct a cost comparison for a minimum of three potential sites, one of which must be a U.S. Government facility. S/he must make every effort to select a site that is the most advantageous to the U.S. Government. Cost comparisons must include, but not be limited to, a determination of the adequacy of lodging rooms at the established per diem rates, overall convenience of the conference location, fees, availability of meeting space, equipment and supplies, and the commuting or travel distance of attendees. (See [FTR Chapter 301, Part 301-74.4](#).) The selection of conference facilities must also be in compliance with the FAR requirements.

As a part of the cost comparison, Bureaus/Independent Offices must use the established per diem rate for locations for which costs are compared. Conference planners are encouraged to use the GSA Federal conference planning tool, FedRooms, to facilitate cost comparisons. There are over 3,000 commercial facilities globally in the program that provide accommodations at or below the published per diem rate for the

locality. Information on event and meeting spaces in U.S. Government-owned buildings can be obtained at <http://www.gsa.gov/portal/content/104886>.

While it is always desirable to obtain lodging facilities within the established lodging portion of the per diem rate for a chosen locality, it may not always be possible. In negotiating lodging rates, the employee may exceed the established lodging portion of the per diem rate by up to 25 percent, if necessary (**FTR Chapter 301, Part 301-74.8**). This will provide flexibility in selecting an appropriate property at the most advantageous location. The Bureau/Independent Office sponsoring the conference will request approval to exceed the lodging portion of the per diem rate for the selected locality in the action memorandum accompanying the approval request. If approved, the rate must be allowable for all employees authorized to attend the conference.

Bureaus or Independent Offices (B/IOs) must hold USAID-funded conferences in the United States at an accommodation approved by FEMA. This requirement may only be waived if the Administrator makes a written determination on an individual basis that a waiver is necessary in the public interest for a particular event. Conference planners must determine whether a site is an approved accommodation at <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/applications/hotel/>.

The sponsoring B/IO must maintain a record of the cost of each site considered. The B/IO must make these records available for the inspection of the Office of the Inspector General or other interested parties.

Additional guidance for planning a conference is available in **[FTR Chapter 301, Appendix E, Suggested Guidance for Conference Planning](#)**.

580.3.3.2 Food During USAID-Funded Conferences

Effective Date: 04/11/2012

The provision of food during USAID funded conferences must be in accordance with **[ADS 610, Use of Entertainment Account, Representation Allowances, and Program and Operating Expense Funds for Entertainment](#)**. The general rule is that USAID may not normally provide meals to USAID employees during conferences that are determined to be training activities unless the attendee is in temporary duty status, or the meal is a necessary expense. Attendees must be away from the official duty station for more than 12 hours and at least 50 miles from both the permanent duty station and home in order to be in temporary duty travel status. Light refreshments for morning, afternoon, or evening breaks may be provided if the training is an all-day course or there are extenuating circumstances, e.g., a place to buy refreshments is not available. Light refreshments are defined to include, but are not limited to, coffee, tea, milk, juice, soft drinks, donuts, bagels, fruit, pretzels, cookies, chips, or muffins.

In accordance with **[5 CFR 410.404](#)**, an employee's attendance at a conference may be considered a training activity, when

- (a) The announced purpose of the conference is educational or instructional;
- (b) More than half of the time is scheduled for a planned, organized exchange of information between presenters and audience which meets the definition of training;
- (c) The content of the conference is pertinent to improving individual and/or organizational performance; and
- (d) Development benefits will be derived through the employee's attendance.

The conference coordinator must make a determination that essential training will be conducted during meal(s) provided to local employees. Bureaus and Independent Offices must certify in eCTAS whether or not the conference meets the criteria outlined above and that the provision of meals at the conference is necessary for the employee to obtain the full benefit of the training.

When employees are in temporary duty status and receive meals during a USAID-funded conference, the applicable meals and incidental expenses (M&IE) allowance must be calculated.

- (a) If meals are furnished, the employee must make the appropriate deduction from the M&IE rate. (See [FTR Chapter 301, Part 301-11.18.](#))
- (b) If light refreshments are furnished, no deduction of the M&IE allowance is required. Light refreshments for morning, afternoon, or evening breaks are defined to include, but are not limited to, coffee, tea, milk, juice, soft drinks, donuts, bagels, fruit, pretzels, cookies, chips, or muffins.

See [ADS 610, Use of Entertainment Account, Representation Allowances, and Program and Operating Expense Funds for Entertainment](#), for additional information on the expenditure of appropriated funds for meals and refreshments. The Office of General Counsel should be consulted if there are questions regarding the appropriateness of planned expenditures.

580.3.3.3 Promotional Materials or Benefits

Effective Date: 04/11/2012

The conference planner or designee must not retain for personal use any promotional benefits or materials received from a travel service provider as a result of booking a conference. If offered such benefits as a result of his/her role as a conference planner, s/he must not retain such benefits for your personal use. S/he must only accept such benefits on behalf of the Federal Government, and such accepted benefits must only be used for official Government business. (See [FTR Chapter 301, Part 301-53.3.](#))

503.3.4 Conference Tracking and Approval System

Effective Date: 04/11/2012

The eConference Tracking and Approval System (eCTAS) is the corporate application for managing conference activities that require the approval of the COO. All USAID employees who plan to incur costs to attend an external conference and Bureaus/Independent Offices planning to fund a conference that 20 or more USAID employees will attend must request approval through the eCTAS. See the Additional Help Document [580saa, eConference Tracking and Approval System \(eCTAS\) User Guide](#).

***530.3.5 Reporting Requirement**

Effective Date: 07/06/2012

USAID must report conference expenses on the official website beginning January 31, 2013 and by January 31 of each following year. The report must provide a description of all agency-sponsored conferences from the previous fiscal year where the net expenses were in excess of \$100,000. This description must include the following:

- The total conference expenses incurred by the agency for the conference;
- The location of the conference;
- The date of the conference;
- A brief explanation of how the conference advanced the mission of the Agency;
- The total number of individuals whose travel expenses and/or other expenses were paid for by the Agency; and for any instances where the net expenses for an agency-sponsored conference exceeded \$500,000, the report must include the Administrator's signed waiver that identified the exceptional circumstances that necessitated exceeding this threshold.

580.4 MANDATORY REFERENCES**580.4.1 External Mandatory References**

Effective Date: 07/06/2012

- a. [Federal Acquisition Regulation](#)
- b. [FTR Chapter 301, Part 301-74, Conference Planning](#)
- c. [FTR Chapter 301, Appendix C, Standard Data Elements for Federal Travel](#)

- d. [FTR Chapter 301, Appendix E, Suggested Guidance for Conference Planning](#)
- e. [OMB Memorandum, Eliminating Excess Conference Spending and Promoting Efficiency in Government \(September 21, 2011\)](#)
- *f. [OMB Memorandum, Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations \(May 11, 2012\)](#)

580.4.2 Internal Mandatory References

Effective Date: 04/11/2012

- a. [ADS 522, Performance of Temporary Duty Travel in the U.S. and Abroad](#)
- b. [ADS 610, Use of Entertainment Account, Representation Allowances, and Program and Operating Expense Funds for Entertainment](#)
- c. [ADS 633, Financial Management Aspects of Temporary Duty Travel](#)

580.5 ADDITIONAL HELP

Effective Date: 04/11/2012

- a. [FedRooms.com](#)
- b. [eConference Tracking and Approval System \(eCTAS\) User Guide](#)
- c. [Conference Policy Frequently Asked Questions](#)

580.6 DEFINITIONS

Effective Date: 04/11/2012

The terms and definitions listed below have been incorporated into the ADS Glossary. See the ADS Glossary for all ADS terms and definitions.

conference

For the purposes of ADS 580, a meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium, training activity or other such event that is funded in whole or in part by USAID.

conference coordinator

The person designated by the sponsoring Bureau or Independent Office to plan and serve as the point of contact for a conference.

conference lodging allowance

A pre-determined maximum allowance of up to 25 percent greater than the applicable locality portion of the per diem rate.

employee

For the purposes of ADS 580, a direct-hire, personal services contractor or individual detailed from another government agency to USAID.

external conference

A conference funded or sponsored by entities other than USAID.

training

A learning activity taking place in the U.S., a third country, or in-country in a setting predominantly intended for teaching or imparting certain knowledge and information to the participants with formally designated instructors or lead persons, learning objectives, and outcomes, conducted fulltime or intermittently.

venue

The place where an event is held, such as a hotel or convention center.

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